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Modern Song Writers. IV. Johannes Brahms

Author(s): Fr. Niecks

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fication, after the manner which enters into so many of our pleasures. There is this to be said, moreover, that Mr. Rubinstein at his best is worth a disappointment or two. He resembles the geysers of Iceland. You may visit the geysers again and again without seeing them spout. Then comes a moment when the fitful water-works are turned on, and all bootless trouble is forgotten in the grandeur and curious interest of the spectacle. The result of such a happy moment in Mr. Rubinstein's case is necessarily proportionate in value to the full tide of feeling poured into the music. It appears as though the composition acquires, under his fingers, new life and fuller meaning—as though the gentle becomes more gentle, the furious more furious, and profound emotionalism more profound.

With regard to our artist's purely executive qualities, while it must be contended that they do not form his main attraction, it is certain that they exercise the influence due to consummate mechanical skill which, in the absence of a disturbing emotionalism, would always produce perfect results. Mr. Rubinstein is so sure of his technical powers that he never thinks about them, and sometimes it is clear that he acts in this regard with more confidence than prudence. But at his best he extorts admiration not unmixed with wonder. His command over every gradation of tone, the ease with which he brings under his fingers the most complex structure, giving due prominence to every detail; the perfection of his cantilena, wherein the pianoforte rivals a finished vocalist and transcends most singers in expression; the dainty elegance of style which, displayed in one piece, gives way, in the next, to the thunderings of a Boanerges, or the roar of a winter storm—these are qualities that, united in one person, elevate him to the rank of a phenomenon. We contend, however, that these alone go only part of the way towards making a Rubinstein. The power—and, at the same time, the weakness—of this great pianist consists not in his acquirements, but as those acquirements are affected by his inner self. He is as much a psychological as an artistic study. At any rate, no one can approach to an understanding of the artist without considerable study of the man.

By way of contribution to the study of the man we offer this article—one by no means exhaustive, partly speculative, and assuredly imperfect even as far as it goes. Our readers may be tempted to follow up the line of thought here indicated, and perhaps, to apply the same method in the case of other great performers. We are convinced that it is the right way to get at the secret of an artist who is something higher and better than a mere executive machine.

MODERN SONG WRITERS

IV.—JOHANNES BRAHMS.

BY FR. NIECKS.

THE qualities of Brahms's songs are such as would justify him in laying claim as a song writer to the supremacy among his contemporaries which as a composer of symphonies is universally accorded to him. But before engaging in the examination of these qualities, let us take a glance at the master's life and his works generally.

Johannes Brahms was born on May 7, 1833, at Hamburg, where his father was a double-bass player in the orchestra. The latter fact insured of course his early introduction to the musical art, into which he grew and with which he became imbued as it were unawares. He had for his first pianoforte teacher a musician of the name of O. Cossel. In 1845 he came under the guidance of Edward Marxsen, who systematically taught him the theoretical branches of the art, to which, however, he had already previously paid some attention. Two years later, at the age of fourteen, he made his first public appearance, playing with great success, among other things, variations on a folk-song of his own composition. It may not be amiss to say here a few words about the master whom Brahms still gratefully cherishes.

Edward Marxsen (born 1806), who, after studying in Hamburg under Clasing, enjoyed, during a stay of sixteen months in Vienna (1830-31), the tuition of Bocklet in pianoforte playing, and of Seyfried in counterpoint, settled subsequently at Hamburg, and devoted himself to teaching and composition, by both of which he acquired the esteem of the best. The conferring upon him of the title *Königlicher Musikdirektor* (Royal Music-director), in 1875, shows that his merits have not been overlooked in high places. Among his pupils he numbers, besides Brahms, another, though less eminent, notability—namely, Ludwig Deppe. As a composer Marxsen has tried his powers in symphonies, overtures, pianoforte pieces, songs, &c. In 1839 Schumann reviewed favourably two of his pianoforte works, three Pièces Fugitives (Op. 31), and three Impromptus for the left hand.

But to return to the subject of this essay, Brahms stayed with his parents in Hamburg till 1853, when he undertook a concert-tour with the Hungarian violinist Reményi. The connection, however, was not of long duration. Fétis remarks that Brahms, fortunately for himself, soon parted from "this kind of vagabond, whose talent is very extraordinary, but whose habits cannot please a well-born artist." No doubt the two were strangely matched, although, of course, the disparity was then not so great as it would be now. For though the Hungarian may have preserved all his original wildness, the German has certainly become artistically more temperate than he was in those early days. According to another account, it was the success he obtained at Hanover, Göttingen, Weimar, and other towns that determined Brahms to dissolve his partnership with Reményi. Liszt and Joachim were among those whose admiration he excited; the latter was particularly struck by the impromptu transposition of the piano part (a semitone higher, on account of the low pitch of the instrument) of a sonata for violin and piano by Beethoven. According to Dr. Schubrig, the scene of action was Göttingen and the sonata in question the one in A major (Op. 47), the Kreutzer sonata; according to La Mara the scene of action was Celle and the sonata in question the one in C minor (Op. 30, No. 2). But whether in the one or the other, or in both places, the feat was no doubt performed. And whatever was the cause of the separation, Brahms had parted company with Reményi in October, 1853, when he went on a pilgrimage to Düsseldorf to visit Schumann.* How the latter was impressed by his visitor we learn from a letter of his, dated October 28, 1853, and addressed to a gentleman of the name of Strackerjan.† "Latterly I have been very industrious. Thus have come into existence an Overture to 'Faust,' the copestone of a larger series of scenes from 'Faust'; a Concert-Allegro for piano and orchestra; three Sonatas for the young; a Cycle of Dances, *à quatre mains*, Kinder-

* A manuscript in the possession of Dr. Joseph Joachim, mentioned by Professor Spitta in the article on Schumann in Sir George Grove's "Dictionary of Music and Musicians," throws some light on what Düsseldorf was in those days, and the interest Schumann took in and the influence he must have exercised on young composers. The title-page of the manuscript bears the words: "In anticipation of the arrival of our beloved and honoured friend Joseph Joachim, this sonata was written by Robert Schumann [the finale], Albert Dietrich [the first movement], and Johannes Brahms [who signs himself Johannes Kriesler (Kriesler being a musical character in one of Hoffmann's tales)—the intermezzo]."

† An officer in the Oldenburg Army.

ball; a Concerto for violin and orchestra, and a Fantasia ditto, which Joachim played yesterday in an enchanting manner at the concert. There is now also a young man here, from Hamburg, Johannes Brahms by name, of such a powerful genius [*genialer Kraft*] that he seems to me to outshine by far all younger artists, and of whose wonderful works (especially songs) something will certainly soon also reach you." Such was indeed the effect produced upon Schumann by Brahms's compositions and playing that he felt impelled to proclaim the young musician to the world at large as a newly-risen, epoch-making genius. Schumann had given up the editorship of the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* in 1843, and since then he had ceased to contribute to it, although the appearance of more than one man of talent had tempted him to take up his critical pen again. Now, however, his absorbing activity in composing, could not prevent him from giving expression to his thoughts and emotions—he must tell the joyful news. The main portion of the enthusiastic manifesto entitled "Neue Bahnen" (New Paths), which appeared in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* in October, 1853, that is, immediately on his making Brahms's acquaintance, runs thus:—

"In following with the greatest interest the paths of these elect [Joseph Joachim, Ernst Naumann, Ludwig Norman, Woldemar Bargiel, Theodor Kirchner, Julius Schäffer, Albrecht Dietrich, and C. F. Wilsing] I thought that, after such forerunners, there would and must at last, all on a sudden, appear one whose mission it would be to utter the highest expression of his time in an ideal manner, one who would attain mastery not by degrees, but, like Minerva, would at once spring completely armed from the head of Cronion. And he is come, a youth at whose cradle the Graces and heroes kept watch. He bears the name of Johannes Brahms, came from Hamburg, where he worked in retirement, but was trained by an excellent and enthusiastic teacher [Marxsen] in the most difficult doctrines of the art, and was introduced to me by an honoured and well-known master. Also in his outward appearance he bore all the marks which announce to us: This is one with a mission. Sitting at the piano he began to unveil wonderful regions. We were drawn into more and more magic circles. To this was added his playing, full of genius [*ganz geniales Spiel*], which made of the piano an orchestra of lamenting and jubilating voices. There were sonatas, or rather veiled symphonies; songs whose poetry might be understood without the words, although a deep vocal melody runs through them all; some piano pieces, partly of a dæmonic nature, and of the most graceful form; and sonatas for violin and piano; string quartets—every one so different from every other that each seemed to flow from a different spring. And then it seemed as if, rushing along as a river, he united all in a waterfall, which bore over the down-shooting waves the peaceful rainbow, and on the banks was played around by butterflies, and accompanied by the voices of nightingales.

"When he will lower his magic wand where the powers of the masses in chorus and orchestra lend their forces, we may expect still more wonderful glances into the secrets of the spirit world. May the highest genius give him strength for that of which there is hope, as in him dwells also another genius, that of modesty. His brethren greet him on his first journey through the world, where will await him perhaps wounds, but also laurels and palms. We bid him welcome as a strong champion."

In the following year (1854) Breitkopf and Härtel and Bartholf Senff engraved and printed Brahms's first works, which comprised three Sonatas for piano (Op. 1, 2, and 5); a Trio for piano, violin, and violoncello (Op. 8); a Scherzo for piano (Op. 4), and three books of Songs (Op. 3, 6, and 7). Had not Schumann introduced him to the musical world as he did, these two firms might not have so readily accepted for publication the young, untried composer's unconventional compositions, although his visit to Leipzig, and his playing there at a public concert, on December 17, 1853, no doubt furthered his interests.*

The extraordinary successes he had obtained—the applause of intelligent concert audiences, the admiring friendship of Schumann and other distinguished musicians, and, last and rarest, the goodwill of publishers—did not turn Brahms's head; for after a stay of several weeks with Liszt at Weimar, and some concert-tours, he accepted the posts of chorus-conductor and music-teacher at the court of Lippe-Detmold, and quietly settled down to further studies for the mastery of the mysteries of his art, for which his duties, which claimed him only during the winter months, left him ample leisure. But after a few years he freed himself even from these by no means very exacting engagements. Still, his publications were yet for a good while few and far between. He was thinking more of self-improvement than self-manifestation. Indeed, he was passing through the most acute stage of artistic fermentation. His Op. 9, Variations for piano on a theme of Schumann, came out soon after the works above enumerated; Op. 10, Ballades for piano, in 1856. The Serenade for orchestra (Op. 11) did not appear till 1861; and the Serenade for small orchestra (Op. 16) and the Sextet (Op. 18), not till 1862. In January, 1859, he played at Leipzig, for the first time, his Pianoforte Concerto (Op. 15), which, however, was then not yet published. Interspersed between these more important works there were an "Ave Maria" for female voices, organ, and orchestra (Op. 12); a Funeral Hymn for chorus and wind band (Op. 13); eight Songs and Romances (Op. 14), and four Part-Songs for female voices, two horns, and harp (Op. 17).

Since leaving Detmold Brahms has travelled and frequently changed his place of residence, living now at Hamburg, now at Zurich, now at Vienna, now at Baden-Baden, &c. Up to 1863 he seems to have remained attached to his native town, subsequently the Austrian capital had the greatest attraction for him. However, we need not follow the course of Brahms's life, for, apart from the publication and production of his works, it is, as far as we know, uneventful. The only other outstanding facts of his life that ought to be noticed here are his direction of the Vienna Singakademie during the season 1863-1864, with which society he brought to a hearing Bach's Christmas Oratorio and Cantata "Ich hatte viel Bekümmerniss"; and his direction of the Concerts of the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde from 1872-1875, where he had Rubinstein as predecessor and Herbeck as successor; perhaps also such honours bestowed upon him as the Maximilian Order by the King of Bavaria, the title of Doctor by the Philosophical faculty of Breslau, and the membership of their body by the Berlin Academy of Arts.

Brahms prefers the retirement of his study and intercourse with a circle of intimate friends to the turmoil and strife of the great world. Unlike so many of his famous contemporaries, he publishes nothing but music. Indeed, considering the eminence of the artist, it is astonishing how little we know of the character of the man. The personality of Wagner, of Liszt, of Rubinstein, of Bülow, and of others is, as it were, an open book to everyone. But

* The connoisseurs of Leipzig were, according to a contemporary account, divided into two parties, the *exaltados* and the *moderados*, the latter admitting, indeed, Brahms's talent and boldness, but accusing him of crudeness, awkwardness, and immaturity.

what do we know of the personality of Brahms? As pianist and conductor he has been often enough before the public, and yet he has managed to remain, one might almost say, hidden behind a curtain, an invisible, mysterious presence. This being so, a peep behind the curtain cannot be otherwise than acceptable. Dr. Hermann Deiters, who made his acquaintance at Bonn about the middle of the sixth decade of this century, says that Brahms distinguished himself by his whole nature from the young men in whose company he met him. "Not, however, by that outward unrestraint of artists which rarely impresses one sympathetically; and yet he seemed to be unconcerned about the surrounding world, full of an artistic ideal, of a vigorous striving conscious of its aim, and gaily and willingly communicating out of the treasury of his convictions."* Another peep shows us the man about twenty-two years later. "A week ago," wrote from Baden-Baden, on September 28, 1877, the composer, Adolf Jensen, to one of his friends, "Brahms called on me, who is in the habit of enjoying here every year the beautiful autumn days. In spite of his colossal inwardness he is outwardly so simple, loyal, and upright that I feel always exceedingly comfortable in his society. He is still here, and I hope to see him again."† Very characteristic seems to me what I heard one evening, years ago, at the supper table of a well-known German conductor, composer, and pianist. Brahms had lately been in the town, and had conducted his latest symphony. What more natural, therefore, than that the conversation should turn to this interesting incident of the musical season! Addressing me, the lady of the house exclaimed: "Imagine! Brahms, when after the performance he was warmly congratulated by my husband and other musicians in the artists' room, pretended that the work no longer interested him. What affectation!" And the Herr Kapellmeister nodded assent to this remark of his wife. Now, with all respect (and it is most genuine) for the estimable persons whom I have taken the liberty to introduce into the discussion, I venture to think that the interpretation given to Brahms's words was not correct. I have no difficulty in believing that they expressed nothing but the simple truth; nay, I would go farther, and say that they seem to me in consonance with the whole tenor of his life, with that unwearied, unselfish striving after greater perfection, regardless of reward or success of any kind. Indeed, the true artist can only regard a work achieved as a stepping-stone; for even should he in each work rise to his ideal, his doing so would place him successively on levels whence wider views present themselves to his sight, and call up in him new and nobler ideals. These reflections lead us to a consideration of the master's works.

Liberally gifted as Brahms showed himself in his earliest compositions, they contained along with the universally normal too much of individual lawlessness, along with what was, and ever will be, beautiful, too much of mere ingenuity and downright eccentricity, to be altogether satisfactory as works of art. In one word, the artist was the servant of his imagination, whereas the reverse relation is the only proper one. The composer felt that himself, and when after an interval of some years he came once more forward with new works (the Serenades, the Sextet, &c.), it was evident that the time had been spent in studying the great masters, in severe self-criticism, and in exertions for the attainment of a thorough craftsmanship. And this study, this self-criticism, this exertion were not confined to those years alone, but have been going on ever since up to the present day. Brahms is unceasingly striving for a nobler content and a more perfect form. Beginning as a deep-dyed romanticist, he more and more developed into a classicist, till at last he has become—without indiscriminately eschewing the resources of romanticism—the foremost representative of classical art—*i.e.*, of the art in which beauty of form is a *sine qua non* and the supreme law. For a long time Brahms's music was "caviare to the general"; so far from pleasing the millions, it may be said to have touched only a few hundred believing disciples. It was not till 1868, when he produced his forty-fifth work, the "Deutsche Requiem" ("German Requiem"), that a more general interest began to be taken in this master's works. The "Triumphlied" ("Song of Triumph") for double chorus and orchestra (Op. 55), 1871, and the "Schicksalslied" ("Song of Destiny") for chorus and orchestra (Op. 54), 1872, deepened and spread the favourable impression made by the "Deutsche Requiem." And this was done perhaps even more effectually by the Symphonies, the first of which (Op. 68), in C minor, was first performed in 1876; the second (Op. 72), in D major, in 1877; the third (Op. 90), in F major, in 1883; and the fourth, in E minor, in 1885. Brahms has cultivated every branch of composition except one, the opera, of which he has not given us, and is not likely to give us, an example. The exception ought to be noted as significant. To complete my account of Brahms as a symphonic composer, I must mention yet, in addition to the first Concerto for piano and orchestra (Op. 15), a second one for the same solo instrument; a Concerto for violin and orchestra (Op. 77); Variations on a theme of Haydn for orchestra (Op. 56), and the Tragic Overture. As a composer of chamber music Brahms ranks very high, and his contributions in this *genre* are both numerous and varied—two Sextets for strings (Op. 18 and 36); a Quintet for piano and strings (Op. 34); three Quartets for piano and strings (Op. 25, 26, and 60); three Quartets for strings (Op. 51 and 67); a Trio for piano, violin, and violoncello (Op. 8); a Trio for piano, violin, and horn (Op. 40); a Sonata for piano and violoncello (Op. 38), and a Sonata for piano and violin (Op. 78). Then there are a number of piano pieces (ballades, variations, studies, &c.), choruses with accompaniment, part-songs for female voices, duets, and songs for a single voice, to which latter we shall presently give our whole attention.

Has then Brahms fulfilled Schumann's prophecy? I do not think that it can be said of him that he has "uttered the highest expression of his time in an ideal manner." But for all that Brahms is a composer of great power. If I am not able to say with the worshippers of the master that in his works has ripened and borne fruit what Schumann aimed at and failed to achieve, that the one is the necessary complement of the other, and that in writing his first symphony he added a tenth to Beethoven's nine, I am still less able to approve the sneers of Wagner* and the venomous expectorations of a section of his partisans.† We may admit Brahms's superiority in the mastery of form. But do we find in his music Schumann's glow of feeling, fragrance of poetry; in short, his magic of romance? And Beethoven? Does he not stand as yet unequalled in force and depth of mascu-

* Breitkopf and Härtel's "Sammlung Musikalischer Vorträge," Nos. 23 and 24: "Johannes Brahms," by H. Deiters.

† "Aus Briefen Adolf Jensen's." Berlin: J. Trautwein.

* Take, for instance, this sentence from the *Bayreuther Blätter* of the year 1879 (p. 127). "They have been obliged to admit that I conduct well and know how to inculcate a correct rendering; on the other hand, I have not bound myself to teach also how to compose, as I may properly think that this is well done by those of Beethoven's successors who write Brahmsian symphonies."

† I have especially in my mind Joseph Rubinstein, who distinguished himself so infamously by his criticisms on Schumann, Brahms, and other composers in the *Bayreuther Blätter*.

line thought and the heart and mind-compelling power of evolving the infinitely great from the apparently little, of combining the profusely manifold into clear, beautiful, and undoubtable unity? As regards the disparagers, one can forgive a creative artist like Wagner his exclusiveness, which may be a necessary condition of his greatness, the latter being the result of concentration and peculiarity of direction; but if those who are not original creative artists exhibit such want of sympathy, and even make a boast of it, as if narrowness were a virtue, any fair-thinking man ought to consider it incumbent upon him to expose the falseness of their position and the hollowness of their pretension. A critic must have an eye for faults and excellencies alike, and be able to distinguish the proportion which they bear to each other. Now, that is exactly what neither the worshippers nor the disparagers do, who, on the contrary, are blind to one side, and view the other through a magnifying glass.

I called it significant that Brahms never composed an opera. It points indeed to the chief characteristic of the master—his habit of looking inward rather than outward, a habit which degenerates often into sombre brooding and subtle rumination. This inwardness, with its concomitant disregard of the sensuous for its own sake, of mere euphony and *ad captandum* effects, stamp him as a Germanic composer, whose nationality, moreover, is widened by every turn of thought and expression. Hence the complete neglect of him by the Romanic nations, a fate which he shares with another, though differently tempered, countryman of his, I mean Louis Spohr. Even in France, where latterly so much has been done for the popularisation of symphonic and, to some extent also, vocal concert music, and where chamber music, although less cultivated, receives a not inconsiderable measure of attention, Brahms is almost unknown; at any rate, not one of his works has been incorporated into the regular *répertoire*, and very few indeed have had the honour of a performance. As late as 1885, Dr. Hans von Bülow's performance of Brahms's Scherzo for piano was accompanied by the audience of one of Colonne's Châtelet concerts by hemming, coughing, and groaning. This is, of course, no conclusive proof of French opinion with regard to Brahms's works generally; but it shows, at least, that his name does not command respectful silence when his music does not immediately please. That, however, the master is not popular even in Germany might be gathered, if this were not already made clear enough by the serious and subtle nature of his works, from a saying which is reported of the Viennese, *à propos* of the first performance of the Third Symphony: "This time we have understood Brahms at once."

It seems almost a mystery that Brahms, with his bent toward the larger forms and the developing and deepening of thought, should at the same time excel in songs. This, however, is most emphatically the case, and much of the mystery disappears when we consider the nature of the thematic material of the works in the larger forms. Brahms, we may assume, regards the composition of songs as a relaxation after more arduous undertakings, as a kind of sport after work; and the publication of two, three, and even four sets of songs in close succession shows that the sport is pursued passionately. Here is a list of his productions in this *genre:* Op. 3 (6),* 6 (6), 7 (6), 14 (8 songs and romances), 19 (19), 32 (9), 33 (15 romances), 43 (4), 46 (4), 47 (4), 48 (7), 49 (5), 57 (8), 63 (9), 69 (9), 70 (4), 71 (5), 72 (5), 84 (romances for one and two voices), 85 (6), 86 (6), 94 (5), 95 (7), 96 (4), and 97 (6). In short, Brahms has nearly reached the third quarter of the second hundred, and the above list does not contain his songs for two voices (for instance, Op. 20, 28, 61, 66, and 75), nor those for four and more voices (for instance, the Liebeslieder, waltzes for pianoforte duet and voices, Op. 52 and 65; and twelve songs and romances for female chorus, &c.)

Of all the works of Brahms which Schumann saw and heard at Düsseldorf in 1853, he was especially struck by the songs (see the above-quoted passage from his letter to Strackerjan). And if we take up Brahms's Op. 97, his last publication in this *genre*, we notice no falling off; on the contrary, we cannot but recognise in him one of the most genuine classical song writers. His songs are real songs (not declamations which, however legitimate as a form of composition, however interesting as music, can lay no just claim to the name)—*i.e.*, lyrical effusions, feelings transmuted into melody. Although, as a rule, melodic, Brahms does, however, not hesitate to be declamatory where this suits his purpose. His setting of Heine's "Der Tod, das ist die Kühle Nacht" (Op. 96, No. 1) is an instance. But even here he is only to some extent declamatory, and for the most part fragmentarily melodic. The dream-like effect aimed at demanded the predominance of colour over form.

Brahms's melody is distinguished by purity, simplicity, naturalness, and grace. Exquisite pleasure may even be derived from following its lovely lines with the eye as they appear on paper. Schubert was no doubt one of the most influential of the master's teachers; we perceive this especially in his early songs, in one of which (Op. 6, No. 2; see "Spring," in Novello's fourth "Album of German Song") his predecessor's "Thine is my heart" seems all through to be struggling to assert itself. But a still more influential master of Brahms was Beethoven, much of whose virile frankness he has succeeded in assimilating. Schumann, too, was a very influential master of our composer; not, however, in melody. To what extent, if at all, Brahms profited by the example of Robert Franz, who preceded him by eleven years in the publication of songs, it would be difficult to determine.

Turning from the melody to the accompaniment, we are struck first of all by its infinite variety, and on recovering from this surprise we perceive with no less wonder the rare perfection of the workmanship. But, and this is remarkable, however rich the accompaniment may be, it remains an accompaniment, a subordinate companion, a zealous supporter. The special form of the accompaniment is often due to the words, whose suggestion the composer may have sometimes followed unconsciously. At any rate, the tone-painting we not unfrequently meet with in Brahms's songs is so delicate, so unobtrusive, and yet so effective, that, whatever theory we may adopt as to its genesis, we are bound to own that nature and art go here hand in hand and do their very best. The last *opus* of songs contains three (Nos. 1, 2, and 3) in which the accompaniment indicates respectively the song of the nightingale, the chirping of a young bird, and the clatter of a horse's hoofs, especially the first in a very reticent manner. In No. 4 of Op. 96 (Heine's "Meerfahrt") the accompaniment of the fascinating melody calls up in the mind of the hearer the jerky sounds of oars moving in the rowlocks. But Brahms understands also how to realise atmospheric effects. The sunshine in No. 3 of Op. 96 (Heine's "Es sehen die Blumen") is to me as unmistakable as the darkness in No. 1 (Heine's "Der Tod, das ist die kalte Nacht"). Nor is this mastery

* The figures in parentheses indicate the number of songs contained in the sets.

in the painting of backgrounds confined to the later songs, although it is there most conspicuous. The inquirer will find an interesting early example in Op. 3, No. 6 ("Song," in Novello's fourth "Album of German Song").

As to form, Brahms has furnished examples of almost every kind, from the simple folk-song to the most elaborate through-composed art-song and romance. His fifteen romances from Tieck's "Magelone" (Op. 33) may in every sense of the word and without exaggeration be called classical. They are not only among the finest of Brahms's compositions for one voice and pianoforte accompaniment, but also among the finest specimens of the kind generally. The genius of serene beauty, we hold, must have inspired them. It would be impossible to examine the peculiarities and estimate the excellences of the many songs which Brahms has given to the world within the limits of an article; this could not be done even with all the classes into which they might be divided. I shall therefore take a leap from one extreme to the other, from the most extended (though not most elaborate) compositions for one voice, the romances, to the shortest, the folk-songs. These latter are very numerous among Brahms's songs. Mr. Hueffer's collection (Novello's fourth "Album of German Song"), which contains twenty-seven songs, and is confined to the earlier works (Op. 3—19), includes as many as seven. Nor are those which are thus entitled the only folk-songs. Indeed, the popular element occupies a large space in Brahms's music, and is an important ingredient in his style. Here I may also mention that the sombreness which makes itself so frequently felt in his larger works is hardly to be met with in the songs. Op. 94 may be instanced as an exception.

I have repeatedly mentioned Novello's lately published fourth "Album of German Song," which consists of a selection of Brahms's songs by Mr. Hueffer. We may, perhaps, wish this or that song added to the Album, or included in it the later as well as the earlier songs, but we are not likely to advocate the exclusion of any it contains.

And now a concluding word on Brahms as a song writer. Dangerous as prophesying is, I venture to express my belief that this master's songs will have a permanent place in musical literature. I hesitate the less to express this belief as it is shared not only by his thorough-going admirers, but even by those who are decidedly sceptical with regard to his symphonic productions. My reasons for my belief in the vitality of the songs are the genuineness of their inspiration and the perfectness of their form.

THE GREAT COMPOSERS

By JOSEPH BENNETT.

No. XVIII.—SCHUBERT (*continued from page 330*).

AT the beginning of 1825 Schubert was again resident in his dear Vienna, living as careless a life as ever with the few people whom he admitted to his intimacy. At this time he made the acquaintance of Sofie Müller, who enjoyed some renown as an actress, and was a singer to boot. Schubert and his cronies often visited the lady, the composer taking with him his newest songs for the pleasure of hearing her interpret them. Likely enough he wrote songs for no other purpose, and, if so, we should give thanks that Sofie Müller existed, and had a taste for music. From the artist's diary, published in 1832, we gather the names of some of the works with which she was concerned. Amongst them are that genuine masterpiece, the "Young Nun," "Der Einsame" and "Drang in die Ferne." The last gathering at her house took place on March 30, shortly before Schubert started for a holiday amidst the romantic scenery of the Austrian Tyrol.

We are not informed how Schubert found the money for travelling expenses, but it may well be that he needed very little. Once on the scene of his wanderings every house was opened to him, and as the singer Vogl was his companion it is not likely that the cost of moving from place to place troubled him much. Be this as it may, our composer found himself at Steyr, Vogl's birthplace, some time in April. From that town the friends made excursions to various places within reach. "When summer began," writes Kreissle, "the two artists, like wandering minstrels, started forth on their beautiful country expedition, bent on making at one time a stately convent, at another a city or town, ring with their already famous lays. They made considerable halts at Linz and Gmunden, and again at the proper starting point of their wanderings—Vogl's birthplace. Everywhere they fell in with friends and acquaintances, who received them with open arms. The still living witnesses of these days of Schubert's wanderings talk with delight of the happy hours they passed in the society of the unassuming and, at that time, happy and cheerful Schubert." One loves to think about, and sympathise with, the composer's delightful experience during this tour. To him came so few moments of life's sunshine, that the pleasure his journey gave him seems, as we dwell upon it, to find its own reflection in ourselves, especially when we consider that, if there be any truth in the theory of nature's compensation, his delight must have been intense indeed—the crowding into a few weeks of enjoyment that which with most people is spread over years. We learn incidentally that he was far too busy with his new friends to think much of those at home, and it is like the careless Schubert to be told by his father in a letter:—"I, as well as all your belongings, am surprised at your not letting us hear anything of you." He wrote to nobody, as far as can be ascertained, till July 21, when he communicated with his friend Spaun, whom he had hoped to find at Linz, but did not. We can judge of his high spirits from the opening sentences of the letter:—

"You may well imagine my uncommon vexation in being obliged in Linz to write to you in Lemberg. Deuce take that abominable duty which separates friends from one another, when they had scarce sipped the cup of friendship. Here, I am sitting still in Linz, half dead with the melting heat and perspiration. I have a whole number of new songs, and you are not here! Are you not ashamed? Linz without you is a body without a soul, a rider without a head, broth without salt. If I didn't get good beer at Jägermaier's and decent wine at the Schlossberg, I would go and hang myself on the parade out of grief for the soul of the Linzers, which has taken wing and flown away."

Further on he says: "For the rest, don't let your hair grow grey with misery at being so far away from us. Brave the simple fate, let your gentle spirit expand like a flower, that you may diffuse the warmth of life in the cold north, and show your divine origin wherever you go." Then he adds a pompous aphorism akin to those already quoted from his diary: "Contemptible is the grief which stealthily creeps upon a noble heart; cast it away from you, and tear to pieces the vulture which is gnawing at your heart."

On July 25 Schubert found time to send off a letter to his parents. He began it with a confession of sin: "I admit the justice of your rebuke at my long silence," and went on to a lame excuse: "But, as I am averse to writing mere empty words, and the present time with me offers but little of interest, you